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# **LOCAL COMMUNITY ON TRIAL**

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## **Introduction**

Twenty years ago, few policymakers in the advanced economies would have expected localities facing sustained economic hardship to sort out their own problems, especially through the route of rebuilding local community. There was still a sense that urban and regional fortunes were intertwined and influenced by embedded power asymmetries within and between places, such that an effective local economic development strategy would have to regulate inter-regional competition, guard against the consequences of trends in the wider political economy such as heightened capital concentration and centralization, and mobilize state action through active urban, regional and welfare policies to redirect investment, jobs, and income to the less favoured areas. Classical political economy still just about held sway, drawing on the likes of Marx, Keynes, Myrdal, Perroux, Innes, Hirschman, and Kaldor, to endorse the principle of the trans-local society of connections and commitments. Regional disparities, measured in terms of (un)employment, productivity and welfare differentials slowly narrowed with the help of redistributionist policies, albeit without stimulating self-sustaining growth in the less favoured areas. Community, when invoked, as during the famous community development projects of the 1970s, was done so as a differentiated category (attentive to divisions of class, gender and race) and as a means of socially empowering hard-hit localities. It came with no major economic regeneration expectations other than the sense that well-being was good for labour market participation or that community could spawn small-scale activity in the alternative economy.

Then along came neo-liberalism – backed up a vengeful New Right and a relieved international business community - to sweep away this mode of thinking and acting, arguing that the society of connections and commitments interfered with the efficient market allocation of resources and growth potential, created a culture of dependency and expectancy in the assisted areas and their inhabitants, was a drain on public resources and perpetuated unnecessary state intervention in the economy, conceded too much to the weak and their organizations, and to boot, failed to stimulate entrepreneurship and growth in declining or lagging cities and regions. In the UK, the cradle of New Right thinking, a policy revolution was unleashed in the 1980s, involving cuts in regional aid, giving business free reign, re-orienting state support to underpin growth in the prosperous regions, introducing measures to promote entrepreneurship and innovation in the less favoured regions, replacing democratically elected institutions by unelected quangos and

business-led organizations as key players in local regeneration, and refashioning welfare as workfare and welfare dependency as moral and social degeneracy. Out went the hand-out philosophy and in came the get-on-your bike philosophy and business-knows best philosophy, poised around a paradoxical understanding of the social. The principle of the society of connections and commitments was jettisoned in preference for the principle of the society of individuals and families, while the idea of community, when retained, was thrown at the hard-pressed areas as an expectation of moral conformity social consensus. The social was individualized and marketized by the New Right, reserved only as a residual category to describe a malignant of dysfunctional social and spatial periphery. In the meantime, urban and regional inequality intensified across a wide range of indicators including health and morbidity, education, economic prosperity, housing, social breakdown and alienation, and fear and insecurity without stimulating self-sustaining growth in the less favoured areas.

Then, recently, along has come the Third Way – driven by new social democrats vengeful of both the Old Left and the New Right – to harness the idea of the society of connections and commitments to the principles of market freedom and unhampered growth in the core regions. Here too, the UK government under New Labour, balancing on the shoulders of the likes of Hayek, Giddens, Etzioni, and Putnam, has led the way in experimenting with a new trickery that simultaneously works in socio-spatial inequality and equality (Hall, 2003). Third Way thinking is not confined to the UK, but is also inscribed in the policies of the EU in the form of active measures to promote social cohesion and equally active measures to promote competitiveness through market liberalization and deregulation, as it is increasingly conjured up by Left of Centre governments hampered by rising social and regional budgets. The Third Way, sharing New Right concerns over redistributionist regional policies, has chosen to accompany market-led policies working for the more prosperous regions with a series of measures to boost the competitive potential of the disadvantaged and less prosperous regions. Regional competition, thus, is forecast to work for both the core and the periphery through processes of regional specialization and the mobilization of latent potential. The Third Way has spawned a new localism underpinned by policies to build regional capacity through the promotion of locally referenced activity such as industrial clusters, technopoles, and local knowledge transfer, harnessed to various institutions of regional promotion such as regional development agencies, business-led regional assemblies, and devolution in general. For the Third Way, there was to be no return to a hand-out policy culture, only the forward march to ‘a hand-up-on-your-bike’ hybrid couched in rhetoric of restoring power and capacity to the regions.

This repackaging of the economy and polity as a series of self-reliant territorial entities<sup>1</sup> has been accompanied by a similar repackaging of the social as the special feature of hard-pressed areas affected by high levels of unemployment and social stress or breakdown. Yet another hybrid, it rejects the New Right’s skepticism of the society of connections and commitments, but it shares its expectation of responsibility, moral uprightness and conformity from the down and out or marginalised, now, however, on the

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<sup>1</sup> A new regional ontology that fails to recognize that one of the consequences of globalization is the dismantlement of regions as sequestered entities – see Amin, 2004.

basis of varied forms of collective provision and support. The collectivist ethic of the old school of social democracy has been restored, but its state-driven universalism has been replaced by a conformist civic particularism, one that expects collective action from communities in particular places and for highly instrumental ends. This new ethic is epitomized by talk of revitalizing social capital, community cohesion, civic responsibility, public spaces, and the social economy within the hard-pressed areas as a basis for their economic, social and political renewal. The Third Way has taken the process of particularizing the social begun by the New Right a lot further.

While plenty has been written about the reinvention of the social by the Third Way as a new governmentality of control, consensus, and social integration (Rose, 1999; Levitas, 1999), less has been said about its subtle elision of social and the local, and about the implications of this for urban and regional regeneration<sup>2</sup>. This is the theme taken up by this paper, beginning with a critical appraisal of the recent turn to local community (a term used loosely here to incorporate all of the above listed aspects and expectations), and followed by an alternative designation of the local-social that is less instrumentalist, decidedly a-moral (though equally ethical), agonistically political, and geographically unconstrained.

### **The localization of the social**

The rediscovery of the social by the Third Way as a policy instrument for local renewal has been most actively pursued by the Blair government in the UK since the late 1990s. It certainly is the main plank of urban regeneration policies rolled out of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and powerful units close to Number 10, such as the Social Exclusion Unit and the Policy Strategy Unit. But it is also visible in a new spatial sensibility that has grown across other government Departments with a national remit, such as the Home Office's emphasis on community cohesion and civic responsibility, the Department of Work and Pensions' targeted labour market and social welfare schemes for the most deprived areas, and the Department of Education and Skills' special schools for inner urban areas. This spatialisation of what traditionally have been national policy domains differentiated on social rather than territorial grounds, is in part the product of a reconceptualisation of the problem of social exclusion *as a problem of local origin* and the challenge of local regeneration as a challenge for local actors.

This acknowledgement of place and place-specificity has brought about the shift from a culture of top-down universal policies available to all (but usually blunt to local difference) towards a frame of provision for bottom-up and locally negotiated priorities through a patchwork of national spatial and non-spatial policies, plus strong central government support for local initiatives based on community involvement. Building on a stakeholder trend within urban policy introduced by their Conservative predecessors (biased towards initiatives driven by unelected quangos and local business elites and allocated through competitive national tender), New Labour has shifted the emphasis towards a less competitive regime and towards initiatives with greater leadership from

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<sup>2</sup> A notable recent example is Osborne and Rose's (2004) insightful account of the practices of spatialisation woven into different historical models of social improvement in the UK.

local government, community participation, and stakeholder involvement in individual projects (Marinetto, 2003). My aim in this section is not to list or review the New Labour's policies on local regeneration, but to critically review the core expectations behind a new Third Way governmentality of the social based on local community empowerment as the driver of both economic regeneration and democratic renewal. There are at least four overlapping assumptions knitting together a new standard for local regeneration in different national and local contexts.

The first revolves around the concept of community cohesion, which, through varied meanings such as the desirability of mixed neighbourhoods, shared public spaces, and sense of community itself, is held to inculcate regard towards others, civic pride and responsibility, social confidence, and public participation (Kearns and Turok, 2003). The cohesive local community is believed to be the empowered and responsible community, a force in local regeneration through the energies and resources released by people helping themselves and each other, looking after the local built and natural environment, participating in public life, taking up local responsibility through voluntary organizations, and, above all, raising their economic agency and potential through better social connectivity and self esteem (Ilcan and Basok, 2004; White, 2003).

A closely related second expectation draws on the concept of social capital. Varying local and national policy communities have begun to explore ways in which institutionalized and informal networks of trust, reciprocity and solidarity in given neighbourhoods, cities and regions might be encouraged. This policy development is largely derived from Putnam's general thesis on the mutually enhancing relationship between participation in civic associations and good governance (as state and civic bodies keep each other in check and active) and between mutuality and economic dynamism (based on the economics of trust). It is also increasingly sensitive to Putnam's distinction between intra-communal networks of solidarity – bonding social capital – which are judged to be inward looking and inimical to economic and political vitality, and cross-group or heterogeneous networks – bridging social capital – which are judged to have the opposite effect by reinforcing wider commitments and an openness to change (Putnam, 2000). The society of commitments has come to be understood as the imperative to bridge local difference and inculcate local obligation through networks of trust and solidarity.

A third expectation is community participation, harnessed, once again, to an economic and a political goal. For example, over the last few years there has been an explosion of interest among policymakers in North America and a variety of European countries, in the restorative powers of the social economy, defined as trading activity (monetary and non-monetary, formal and informal) in the hands of third sector organizations, self-help groups, and voluntary agencies, in meeting local welfare needs through the involvement of the socially excluded (Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 2002). Hard-pressed areas are seen as fitting for economic renewal through the social economy, because of the size of a large market of unmet needs (exacerbated by deficient commercial and state provision), because of reduced local opportunities in the economic mainstream, and because of the sector's ability to involve and employ the socially excluded as well as build their

confidence and social capabilities, so that they can become future workers entrepreneurs. But, social inclusion in the form of various types of community participation – from public consultations through to civic involvement in regeneration partnerships - is also seen to be a political good in hard-pressed areas. Community participation is expected to stimulate a sense of community, civic regard, civic energy, and active citizenship (a kind of diffuse democracy to complement the associative democracy).

The fourth core expectation – a summative one in many ways – is the idea of the society of commitments as spatially circumscribed. This is certainly the assumption in readings of areas facing persistent economic hardship and social exclusion. Local authorities, local communities, local organizations of various sorts, local branches of national bodies, are expected to interact in the local public sphere and work as a local political community, often in designated spaces such as regional assemblies, to attend to local problems directly or by pressing for more resources from the centre. The local – a city or region – is imagined as a jurisdiction beyond which the actors have no real business or influence, and as a political community that, through mechanisms of deliberation, partnership and shared interest, knows what is best for the locality and can deliver solutions that work for the common good. Local regeneration is premised around the assumption of a multi-headed, but consensual, political community with localized concerns.

At face value none of this seems problematic. Indeed, set against the legacy of state-driven or market-based cultures of local intervention in the hands of remote and context-blind actors, the new thinking can be praised for recognizing at long last the power and potential of an enlarged democracy that draws on the creative impulses of an active civil society and a devolved polity. Such a shift has long been advocated by the democratic Left concerned with spatial equality. So, why is it problematic? My argument, which I shall develop below, is that it promises a democracy of misplaced assumptions and expectations, one that will fail to both tackle the root causes of spatial inequality and deliver the expected local returns. Third Way localism suffers from a romance of local community that in practice will be assailed from all directions and will be modest in its economic and political returns, especially in the areas in which it is most expected to deliver. At the root of this deficiency lies a problem of spatial ontology in Third Way thinking associated with its reduction when it comes to dealing with the most deprived areas of the society of connections and commitments to local community, while paradoxically retaining a plural, less functionalist and geographically promiscuous understanding of the social for other spaces such as the nation or prosperous cities and regions.

Let me develop this point first. It seems odd that at a time of increasing connections and flows between places linked to diverse geographies of globalization which routinely affect all places albeit in different ways, we should think of some places as somehow spatially enclosed (Urry, 2003; 2004; Massey, 2004; Amin, 2004). The history of areas experiencing marked economic decline and sharp swings, slow and imbalanced growth, and institutional and social degradation is also the history of connections: the product of external control, dependent development, cumulative growth in the more prosperous

regions, outflows of resources and skills, and so on. They are what they are not because of disconnection (Graham and Marvin, ) but because of particular forms of connection, which is why it is inaccurate to reserve the language of connectivity for the spatial mainstream and the language of lack of the means to connect for the latter places, as has become pervasive in Third Way thinking. The effect of this slippage, however, has been the replacement of a normativity of local regeneration through exteriority and connectivity by one of bottom-up effort and local reliance.

In the slipstream of this subtle fusion of the languages of disconnection and lack, community seems to have been drawn into centre-stage as a vehicle for local regeneration. It seems that for spaces that lie beyond the hard-pressed areas, the qualities of *gameinschaft* such as community cohesion and social capital are assumed to combine with the qualities of *gesellschaft* (distributed power, state support, political agonism, creative frictions of the open, differentiated and hybrid society). Instead, in imagining a future for the less favoured and hard-pressed areas, the rich tapestry of the social conceded to other spaces is conjured away, as is the obligation to explain why the social thus defined should provide for economic and democratic vitality. Only a narrowly defined *gameinschaft* is kept in play, and this too, in a highly selective way. Lack of community is blamed for local degeneration<sup>3</sup> without any critical appraisal of other contributing factors - local and trans-local - or of alternative forms of social connectivity that do not fit the stereotype<sup>4</sup>. In turn, the restoration of community<sup>5</sup> is seen to be the mainstay of local economic and political regeneration, once again, without critical assessment of what community really means and without serious analysis of the drivers of change and renewal beyond community. The problem of 'failed' places becomes a problem of eliminating bad community and replacing it with good community, with the unwritten assumption that if and when the policy efforts fail, the communities will have only themselves to blame. They will have chosen to reject community!

Here lies the rub. Through this confused babble of community, is emerging a new pathology of local decline and renewal, backed up by a new science of measures. The hard-pressed localities are now visualized as malignant organisms that require their parts to be restored and linked up through the tonic of community cohesion, local trust and active citizenship. Their future lies in their capacity for self-regeneration. Associated with this comes a strong morality of blame and praise. Social life in the areas of economic decline and social deprivation is seen as dysfunctional and morally deficient, lacking in trust, civic sense, social attachments, altruism, energy and drive. The social symptoms of decline/deprivation become the subject of moral commentary and, through this, thrown back as the causes of decline/deprivation. Much less talk now of lack of job

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Putnam's negative observations on amoral familism in Southern Italy and the excess of bonding social capital in Black US urban areas.

<sup>4</sup> For example, diaspora-based social capital and citizenship, variety in types of social capital in different types of association, or friendship-based forms of trust and solidarities in new forms of family arrangement (Edwards, Franklin and Holland, 2003; Savage et. al, 2004; Goldbourne and Solomos, 2003; Werbner, 2002; Zontini, 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Defined and measured in highly selective ways, such as individual and social groups with particular 'social capital' endowments, mixed neighbourhoods, citizens' juries, engagement in shared spaces (see, Baron, 2004).

opportunities, state obligations, equipping people for social and spatial mobility, rights and entitlements, the consequences of uneven development, productive ways of external linkage, sustained investment in the local infrastructure, enabling citizenship, and other drivers of well-being. Instead, plenty of measures of participation in local and national associations, elections, organized leisure pursuits, circles beyond the immediate family or interest group, work and leisure communities, and so on, with the results thrown back to the hard-pressed communities as evidence of lack and degeneracy.

The new social morality, accompanied by a new science of measures and metrics, is cementing a new science of spatial organization and worth (Rose, 1999) that is gradually naturalizing the idea that community spirit of a certain kind is essential for local regeneration. Before long, once spatially fine-tuned measures of social capital, community cohesion and political participation start to appear with regularity in national and international statistics (which is exactly what we see in the work of the World Bank and the UK Office for National Statistics), other policy perspectives on local regeneration will find it increasingly difficult to make their case. Worse still, the deservingness of places for government regeneration initiatives, together with their worth in a market for investment and attention that increasingly depends on quantitative rankings, will come to be determined by these measures of community. The symptoms of hardship will have become the measures of cure and discipline through sleight of calculus (Raco and Imrie, 2000), while those in the business of building local community will come to measure their own success against the calculi set by the policymakers and funding agencies (Tooke, 2003). In turn, those responsible for community action will become an instrument for the 'domestication' of local politics, charged to deliver a consensual and responsible citizenry that performs the regeneration expectations of ruling elites. No longer the collective voice of the disadvantaged, the marginal and the excluded, pressing for alternatives that may well be a radical odds with the policy solutions on offer (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). Community participation will have become an instrument of political conformity and control rather than a means for inculcating active citizenship without guarantees in a genuinely agonistic public sphere unconstrained by government fiat.

The proof of community-based regeneration, of course, will lie in the eating of the pudding. Given the infancy of Third Way community-based regeneration schemes, there is not much evidence to draw on, beyond piecemeal information on the success and failure of individual initiatives such as mixed housing programmes, community partnerships in neighbourhood renewal, or social enterprise schemes. However, this should not preclude an evaluation on *prima facie* grounds. Perhaps the most obvious question is why expect so much from community in such places? Why expect social capital, participation, and cohesion to come to the rescue when it is in such short supply, and for very good reasons associated with the loss of confidence and hope, anomie and atrophy, suspicion and distrust, social breakdown and circumspection, that accompanies unemployment, lack of opportunity, negative press and institutional abandonment? The down and out – if this is not to caricature the social pathology of deprived areas – are least equipped and least motivated to play at such lofty community expectations, stripped as they are of the material, institutional, experiential, and possibly also the psychological



means to associate with others not like them and to participate in civic and public life. It simply does not make sense to base regeneration on community in these contexts.

Let us take the example of the social economy, and explore where it works. In our recent study (Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 2002) which compared the strength, dynamics and local potential of social enterprises in Bristol, Tower Hamlets in London, Glasgow, and Middlesbrough, we found there to be significant variations between the four UK urban settings. The social economy was much stronger, numerically and in terms of market sustainability, job generation and entrepreneurship, in the more prosperous and socially mixed areas of Bristol and Tower Hamlets. This was because of a number of factors including the presence of a class of experienced and peripatetic social entrepreneurs, proximity to work opportunities in the formal labour market, commitment among providers, clients, and intermediaries such as the local authorities and funding bodies to the sector as a non-mainstream economic sphere, and a heterogeneous social structure containing the disadvantaged as well as community activists, a proactive middle class and other form of civic engagement. Community spirit, prosperity, institutional capacity, connectivity, and class have interacted in creative ways to sustain a vibrant social economy, which, however, is by no means the staple of local economic life.

In contrast, we found the social economy in Glasgow to be less vibrant and less diffuse, the product of a history of a top-down partnership between the local authority and well known community activists applying mainstream criteria of business efficiency to the supported social enterprises. The imperative to make these ventures succeed as a business has put the imperative of community empowerment and alternative values in secondary position, making the successful social enterprises – of which there are few – not that different from mainstream economic regeneration efforts. Not much community involvement here, but instead, a local leadership looking for new ways of meeting community needs. The experience of Middlesbrough has been worse. With its history of branch-plant industrialization, the area now faces extreme deprivation due to successive rounds of industrial abandonment and lack of economic diversification, with no social economy to speak of. The local authorities, which have recently stumbled across the idea of the social economy, do not know what to do with it because of the absence of significant interlocutors as well as their own inability to break with the legacy of top-down economic management, while the few grass-roots impulses that there are, find themselves hampered by a largely homogeneous social structure characterized by widespread deprivation, welfare dependency and expectations of paid employment, and an economic context offering few job prospects, restricted social mobility and constrained capabilities.

What this evidence shows is that the social economy is vibrant in the most prosperous or socially diverse areas that offer a wide net of institutional resources to spark and support the sector<sup>6</sup> as well as plenty of economic opportunities in the formal economy locally or nearby. Even then, the social economy in such areas play a complementary role to state and market, as the circuit of responding to local social needs through the mobilization of

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<sup>6</sup> Ranging from an active civil society and an established circuit of social entrepreneurs, to appropriate local authority intervention in a frame of democratic state engagement with the sector (Graefe, 2002)

the socially excluded, often as a conscious ethical or ideological choice on the part of participants to engage in socially useful or empowering economic activity (Williams, Aldridge and Tooke, 2003). These are the kind of circumstances required in the areas of marked economic and social deprivation for the social economy to play an adjunct role. Without them, the idea of economic regeneration through community involvement of one form or another is simply unrealistic, and potentially irresponsible, since the latter is rarely a pathway to formal employment or entrepreneurship among the socially excluded.

This is not to assume, to come to the political expectations from community participation, that poor neighbourhoods lack community fellowship. Nothing of the sort. There is growing evidence to show that reciprocity and mutual aid is common in such areas as an important way of helping out neighbours, friends and relatives struggling to make ends meet<sup>7</sup>, in the knowledge that such help will be reciprocated some day when needed (Williams and Windebank, 2003). Is this the wrong sort of community, as Putnam would have it, in that it produces bonding social capital rather than bridging social capital? This is entirely the wrong question, in my view, because what needs to be appreciated is how community takes on different meanings in different conditions of economic and social well being and in different institutional settings, as the social economy example has shown. It is hardly surprising that community fellowship among the hard pressed, especially in the most desperate of places, is both circumspect and socially circumscribed and that it is likely (though not necessarily) to become more associative, altruistic and cosmopolitan with improvements to people's material circumstances, social connectivity and well being. It may be that the material circumstances in which bonding capital is produced need to be changed, instead of relying on direct interventions to change the patterns of community participation, in the hope that this will yield better economy and polity.

Current policy thinking seems to be keen on intervening directly to generate bridging social capital in poor neighbourhoods as a pathway to active citizenship<sup>8</sup>, based on efforts to build community participation on a 'ladder of involvement' ranging from 'simple acts of good neighbourliness at one end and a regular commitment with a formal voluntary or statutory organization, or in a position of community leadership at the other' (UK Home Office, 1999: 30, cited in Williams, 2003: 66). Interestingly, though, Williams (2003) shows, on the basis of a review of recent community participation surveys in the UK, that while rates of both one-to-one participation and group participation are high in affluent areas, people in poor neighbourhoods, when 'active', tend to participate largely in one-to-one activities along the lines outlined in the preceding paragraph. This is a significant finding, as it confirms that one form of community participation does not lead to the other form, without changes in the economic and institutional context of the neighbourhood. Similarly, unsurprisingly, emerging surveys of what community participation actually means in the context of partnership-based regeneration policies, tell the story of 'usual suspects' routinely wheeled out to represent an apathetic or disinterested community, of

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Das, 2004, on structures of solidarity among day labourers in Orissa in India.

<sup>8</sup> This is certainly enshrined in the thinking of the UK's Social Exclusion Unit and the more recently established Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, now responsible for driving local regeneration in poor neighbourhoods (Marinetto, 2003).

opportunistic alliances in which local citizens and residents play at best a tokenistic role (in consultations rather than in decision-making and implementation), and of the absence of the poorest working class people, members of black and ethnic minority groups, young people, disable people, women, homeless people – i.e. the excluded (Goodlad, Burton and Croft, 2004).

The observations made in this section on the Third Way approach to local regeneration are not intended to devalue the significance of strategies of social empowerment and bottom-up development. Far from it. Indeed, where community-based initiatives have succeeded in building social confidence, sense of ownership, civic engagement, solidarities across the social divide, and a politics of local care, these can only be judged positively. My objection, instead, lies with the idea of government by community itself – with its narrow and parochial understanding of the society of commitment and connections, as well as with the unrealistic and excessively high regeneration expectations laid at the doorstep of local community. The next section develops an alternative and less instrumentalist understanding of the local-social, which, in turn, implies a very different approach to local regeneration based on a wider conceptualization of the society of commitments and connections.

### **Back to the society of commitments and connections**

The relationship between social empowerment and economic enhancement is not at all straightforward. First, because an empowered citizenry that lacks the means to control its destiny as well as wrest power from or enroll others who routinely shape the world and its ways – others who are never that easy to identify or access, inscribed as they are in instituted practices and habits, diffuse networks, hidden immanence, and distant places – does not possess the autonomy to make and distribute resources. Second, because an empowered citizenry never comes with a common set of interests, which is precisely why so many programmes on the ground are assailed by a politics of uneven voice, social manipulation, conflicting interest, and power imbalance; a politics that regularly compromises the needs of the socially excluded and marginalized. Third, because – pace the communitarians and social capitalists – there is no direct link between social empowerment and economic regeneration or development, because this relationship is intermediated by structures of market relationships, regulations, institutional arrangement, power configuration, and values and norms. Thus, social intervention in one place may lead to economic enhancement somewhere else or require other interventions both there and afar in order to ensure local economic returns.

The implication of these opening observations is that economic regeneration in declining or less favoured areas cannot be based primarily on community-based initiatives, which can only ever work on slow developmental time and with limited impact on local job generation and competitiveness. Such initiatives have to be part of a wider framework of intervention that deals with the causes of local economic decline or imbalance, stimulates local economic demand and provision for it through the economic reinsertion of the displaced and the marginalized, bindingly links policies for competitiveness – national and local – to cohesion objectives, and actively decenters political and economic power.

In short, they must be part of a wider national programme for economic development based on spatial and social equity and political dispersal.

For example, in a recent pamphlet with Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift (2003), we have argued that the current approach to regional development in the UK, based on local boosterism (including community-led regeneration, promotion of local clusters and knowledge industries, and limited devolved government) will not reduce regional disparities because it fails to tackle the secular centrism and skewed trans-regional connections that persistently reinforce power and growth in London and the South East at the expense of the disadvantaged regions. Accordingly, we propose an alternative approach based on a serious commitment to 'decenter the nation', involving redressing macroeconomic policies biased towards the growth regions, the introduction of controls on further expansion in the South, the reintroduction of a redistributive regional policy, national arbitration of competitive bidding for investment between the regions, the relocation of major national cultural, economic and political institutions and remits to the regions, and policies for endogenous growth at the local level that are extrovert, but also demand-driven and welfare-oriented.

The argument here is that effective local economic regeneration requires a multi-polar polity in which the regions can run discrete areas of national life (rather than just a limited set of their own affairs) as well as count on action by the state to redirect opportunities towards them, bolster their bottom-up strategies, and regulate inter-regional competition. This is not an argument for a 'hand-out' approach to local regeneration, but recognition of the principle of spatial mutuality and connectivity. Without attention to the wider institutional and market circumstances that shape local fortunes, community-led strategies will never amount to more than a fob to the hard-pressed cities and regions, possibly even a cold towel, as state welfare support and other redistributive measures are subtly rolled back in the name of support for a community empowerment approach, while the lion's share of policy attention and institutional arrangements for national economic development remain biased towards the most prosperous cities and regions. It is simply perverse that the 'social' should be privileged as a tool for economic regeneration for those areas in which it is thought that the 'social' is somehow deficient, while other avenues for regeneration and other constraints on regeneration – national and regional – in these areas are left unexamined.

In turn, the areas that are expected to deliver community deserve a more respectful and less caricatured characterization of their social conditions. The new literature on community is richly condescending and morally prescriptive. The hard pressed areas are told that they all suffer from the same social pathology of lack of community in its various forms, that they are dysfunctional and have fallen from grace because of this, and that without more community they will go nowhere. In the meantime, society elsewhere, especially in the prosperous areas, is deemed to be just fine! An alternative approach would be, first, to systematically identify the long-term and complex knot of reasons why particular areas and particular social groups end up on the scarp heap, demoralized, and driven to despair and desperate solutions. For example, it is finally dawning on policy analysts that the ethnic riots in the northern English towns of Bradford, Burnley and

Oldham in 2001, were not just about 'race trouble', and still less so about community breakdown and youth indiscipline, but also about economic decline, structural unemployment, lack of job opportunities, institutional neglect, and embedded racism. Second, therefore, it would be to tackle these underlying factors, and provide individuals with the means and opportunities to get jobs and become socially and geographically mobile as a means of social reintegration, instead of banging on about community cohesion.

Third, without in any way neglecting the harsh social realities and particular patterns of social behaviour in run down areas, it would be to acknowledge that such areas also are socially and culturally heterogeneous, complex and conflicting in their needs and interests, and as richly varied in local obligations and ties as anywhere else to family, friends, neighbourhood, and civic community<sup>9</sup>. They too are sites of sociality, attachment, and commitment, and while it may well be the case that the sociology of solidarity among the poor is different from that among the better off, it is a heroic leap of logic indeed to conclude that this is a bad or dysfunctional form of social capital, one that keeps the poor and their neighbourhoods down.

Forth, it would mean to concede a cosmopolitan geography of belonging to such areas. This is not just a matter of recognizing the diaspora attachments and belongings that weave people with transnational community links into 'networked spaces of meaning' (Scott, 2002) in service of a multiple and hybrid sense of place that more often than not includes strong attachments to and claims over the neighbourhood and city of residence (Massey, 2004). It is also a matter of recognizing both 'banal forms of cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2004) that most people have become embroiled in through consumption, travel, and media engagement, as well as new mobile and distanced publics that people are increasingly part of and committed to due to the rise of new means of communication such as the internet, mobile phones and PDAs that allow relational proximity. Rightly, Mimi Sheller (2004: 42) asks, 'are such developments isolating people into cocooned worlds of solitariness, as Putnam and others fear, or are mobile communications enabling new ways of organizing the spatial scale and temporal rhythms of interaction?' There is no reason to think of people in poor areas as people with bad local attachments that need to be made virtuous, and every reason to look into how their engagement in new mobile publics can be harnessed for local benefit.

This brings me to the fifth and final issue I wish to address in this section, namely how the relationship envisaged by Third Way thinking between community and citizenship might be re-conceptualized if a richer understanding of the society of commitments and connections is also conceded to the so-called regeneration areas. The new communitarians<sup>10</sup> are right to desire active citizenship. Who would deny this? Active citizenship is the bedrock of a vigorous democracy. The issue, in my mind, is about what active citizenship is desired for. For the communitarians, it is desired largely for obtaining civic consensus and local community cohesion in service of a utilitarian outcome. However, an alternative argument is that it should be about public ownership

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Mumford and Power, 2003 for a rich analysis of family and community in East London.

<sup>10</sup> I use this term loosely to include social capitalists and ethical moralists.

and participation in an active and contested public sphere, stripped of moral instruction, but hopeful for the agreements that follow from agonistic engagement between equally empowered citizens.

The regeneration areas – yes they too – are spaces of plural publics, contested claims, and irreconcilable understandings of the good life, in possession of a vitality that is only too frequently crushed or manipulated by the dominant sectional interests. In these circumstances, social empowerment is a must so that vested interests and old hierarchies can be challenged through opposition and dissent, culminating in a public sphere capable of supporting multiple publics and novel ones through the vigorous, but democratic, clash of oppositions. A public arena deliberately engineered for community consensus – through partnership schemes, plans for mixed spaces and the like – is not an arena of active citizenship, but an arena of a fragile and forced consensus that glosses over real and irreconcilable divisions. Community building can end up as an act of disempowerment, as yet another consensual fix for regeneration is put into place, now in the name of active citizenship. Instead, there may be merit in stripping social empowerment programmes of the language of community cohesion and social capital formation, and justifying them on their own terms as acts of enhancing the capabilities, voice, rights and presence of the excluded and the marginalized, so that these social actors can become legitimate claimants upon the social turf, even when the claims are not consensual. The expectation of local public service and collective responsibility (usually another name for cooptation into someone else's vision of the good life) should be secondary to the aim of improving the life chances and aspirations of the disempowered and also providing them with the means to participate as equals in a democratically contested public sphere<sup>11</sup>.

A common criticism of such a model of 'citizenship without guarantees' is that it is too promiscuous, and for that, a negation of solidarities around a local commons that the regeneration areas desperately need. I disagree. It is not proposed as a model of democracy that celebrates disunity and gratuitous dissent, but as one that recognizes difference and seeks to build solidarities through negotiations of difference. Iris Marion Young (2002) calls this a model of 'differentiated solidarity', based on the twin principles of allowing people with social and cultural affinities with each other to affirm their distinctiveness if desired, at the same time as finding practical ways of affirming an ideal of inclusion based on 'fellow feeling', defined as a 'mutual respect and caring that presumes distance: that norms of solidarity hold among strangers and those who in many ways remain strange to another' (p. 222). Young's definition of solidarity is clearly a very particular one, and possibly uncomfortably utopian, but the point is that active citizenship based on the exercise of individual and group rights<sup>12</sup> is not necessarily incompatible with the idea of a commons without mutual identification and affinity.

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<sup>11</sup> To return to the example of the 2001 race riots in Northern England, the last thing that the protesting Asian youths (and White youths, for that matter) wanted to be told was to respect community, against a background of institutionalized discrimination, sustained marginalization, and vilification. Repeatedly, during and after the riots, their demand was for material betterment, cultural recognition, and civic rights.

<sup>12</sup> Including housing segregation, mosques, differentiated public spaces, and so on.

Such a commons needs to be worked at, and through all manner of experiment and innovation that can only ever offer temporary and fragile truces, ranging from publicity for the principle of living together in a multicultural society or for the dense everyday networks of institutional relations that bind difference, the de-racialization and de-stigmatization in general of narratives and rules of belonging and citizenship in a multiethnic and multicultural society, controls on major institutions such as the media and other opinion formers on how they treat issues of difference and social worth, new forms of urban citizenship based on rights of residence and rights of influence in varied geographies of attachment (Bauböck, 2003), imaginative experiments in the everyday urban (e.g. communal gardens, youth participation schemes, school twinning, community service) that bring people from different backgrounds together in prosaic joint ventures (Amin, 2002; Amin and Thrift, 2002). Many more examples could be added to this list, with each probably as controversial as the other, but what we can affirm is the real possibility of a commons without community.

As these brief remarks on differentiated solidarity reveal, the nature of the public culture of the commons in a given place, shaped by articulations of everyday local and global relationality, is a crucial determinant of inclusiveness in 'regeneration' efforts. Such a reading of the social is some way away from Third Way thinking on regeneration based on community. In Third Way thinking, the public culture of places is defined in terms of the local balance between good versus bad civic behaviour, uses and abuses of public spaces, or the quality of local articulations of relationality, as though global articulations such as the impact of national cultures of belonging, media cultures, and diaspora attachments are somehow absent or less significant (Demos, 2004). Instead, we might think of the public culture of a place as a *chora* or an 'unplaceable place' (Kymäläinen, 2003: 240) that is nourished by manifold publics of varied spatial reach and duration. As such, it comes to life as a place with a distinctive public culture only as a relational space of overlap and connectivity in these varied networks – the 'scene situates but without containing' (Weber, 2001: 187). This immediately suggests that no locally confined attempt to build the commons is sufficient, that even the most composite and joined up attempts need to be constantly re-examined, and that even then the chances of success come with a large measure of serendipity. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to find as many ways as possible to maintain a certain 'theatricality of the public sphere' marked by a vigorous 'virtuosity of performance' by the many and not just the few, underpinned by a widespread strong 'feeling for the world' that seems to have been lost in all the recent talk of local society (Villa, 2001). The case has to be made for active citizenship without strings, built around many imaginative pragmatic efforts to empower the disempowered, perhaps also the emphasis that early twentieth century US pragmatists – drawing on Adam Smith and David Hume – gave to the concept of sympathy in defining social capital (Farr, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

At one level, this has been a paper about 'spatial phenomenotechnics' (Osborne and Rose, 2004), about how different imaginaries of space come to be regularized with the help of particular mappings of the social and associated measurements and remedies.

The Third Way has conjured up a new practice of spatialisation based on locating social malaise in particular types of geographical space, treating the latter as abnormal and a threat to civic society – container spaces that can be rejuvenated through the magic of community. In the process, older notions of the society of commitments and connections based on trans-local, trans-national, and universalist principles have given way to a peculiar socio-spatial dualism characterized by conceding some of these principles to prosperous places but only the imperative of local community to poor areas. We are seeing the birth of a new normativity of cosmopolitanism for some and social capital for others.

I have, instead, argued for an alternative spatial phenomenotechnics that rejects the social pathologization of areas facing hardship, on the grounds that social striations do not map so neatly onto geographical space. The geographies of the social in poor and rich places are equally complex and equally varied in composition, such that the society of commitments cannot be so clearly demarcated in spatial terms. As a consequence, I have argued that state and market obligations towards less fortunate areas must remain strong, that social empowerment in such areas should be valued on its own terms as an exercise in building an active public sphere, that the social condition of such areas should not be seen in terms of lack but the potential for plenitude and societal reconnection without boundaries, and that experiments with social alterity (e.g. the social economy) have a place in the mainstream and not just those on the margins. The socially and spatially disadvantaged, the experiments of alterity and democracy, are inextricably part of the society of networked longings and belongings and as much part of a democracy for all that allows for action and intervention at varying spatial scales.

At another level, this paper has been about social and spatial obligations. In its zeal to not interfere in the workings of the market, the Third Way has thrown its weight behind the prosperous, redefining its duty of care to the less prosperous as a duty of moral improvement and community empowerment. In the process, once-rich understandings of social and of spatial connectivity have given way to an understanding of society as a string of territories charged with competing their way back into prosperity through the mobilization of their own resources<sup>13</sup>, especially community and civic mobilization in general. The unwitting result has been the funneling of the social into a narrow channel depositing social capital and the like as a tonic for those in need of regeneration, accompanied by an impoverished and utilitarian but largely ineffective understanding of the political and the democratic.

My argument, in contrast, has been in favour of retaining a more promiscuous sense of the political and a more cosmopolitan sense of social and spatial connectivity and commitment. Thus, I have argued that regeneration cannot be a localist affair or a matter of local responsibility alone, but part of a wider political economy of decentred power and redistributive justice. In turn, I have argued that local society – at least in areas facing social and economic hardship - cannot be caricatured in the way that the Third

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<sup>13</sup> Ironically, this rule is magnificently relaxed for the most prosperous areas, which are held to represent the nation, and for this, deserving the attention of mainstream policies (Amin, Massey and Thrift, 2003).



Way has tended to, but deserves to be understood as part of a cosmopolitan society, not blamed for its symptoms, but empowered without expectations. There is a democracy to be preserved and a right to be and become to be respected in such areas, including the right to engage freely, the right not to agree, the right not to play community, the right not to resolve your own affairs. This is not asking for a return to the old days of dependency on the state and others, only the suggestion that community empowerment alone will not remake economy and society in the hard-pressed areas, and also to ask why such places only deserve local community while others are allowed to enjoy cosmopolitan society.

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